



Listening Summary

Why Listening?

Your child's success depends upon their ability to listen and understand what you and others are telling them. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship while building essential listening skills in your children.

Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *"Do you feel listened to? When and by whom?"*
- *"How do you know that the person is truly listening to you?"*
- *"Are there times when someone is not listening to you?"*
- *"How does that make you feel?"*

Tip During a family meal, explore the question: *"What does it take to listen well?"* Allow each family member to respond. Model listening by allowing each person to complete their thoughts without interruption or judgment.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model specific listening strategies while interacting with your teen.
 - Ask yourself: *"What is my body communicating, and how am I demonstrating I'm listening?"*
 - Listen for thought and feeling.
 - Teens still seek and need their parents' attention to thrive. Build a sacred time into your routine when you be fully present to listen to what your teen has to tell you.
- Learn listening strategies together. Teens ages 15-19 are keenly interested in figuring out social dilemmas (asking a crush on a date, talking to a teacher about a poor grade, or responding to a "mean girl's" words). Share a challenge (without a clear solution) at dinnertime, and try out one of the following.
 - Get Curious. Don't stop asking questions when you get one word answers. Try: *"Say more, what was fine about it?"* or *"What was difficult about today?"* or *"What went well?"* or *"Let's start at the beginning,"* or *"What made you laugh today?"*
 - Find Opportunities to Share. Model what it is like to share about your day. If your teen asks you how your day was, be sure to not respond with a superficial or one-word answer. Engage them about a conflict you had, or a struggle you faced. See if they can help offer suggestions.
 - Active Listening. One person listens to fully understand what the speaker is saying and waits until the speaker is finished talking before responding.

- Paraphrasing. Echo back to the speaker a summary of what they've said to check how accurate your listening is and also to confirm to the speaker that you have heard them.
- Seeking Clarification. Practice seeking clarification by asking questions like, *"What did you mean when you said you weren't happy this morning? What happened?"*
- Practice Questioning and Commenting With Empathy. Instead of responding to a speaker with your own experiences, focus solely on the content of what has been communicated. For example, your child might say, *"Today Mrs. Smith started a new writing project. We get to write an essay on any topic we are interested in. I can't wait."* You: *"Sounds like you are excited about this project. Have you thought about what topic you are going to choose?"*

Tip As our teens spend more time alone and with their peers, it can be challenging to entice them into meaningful conversations. *"Fine,"* might be all you get in response to *"How was your day?"* So, turn down the car radio. Hang around them without your phone. Offer plenty of chances to listen when they are ready to talk.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Model aloud for yourself. *"I'm setting a goal for myself to listen at dinner without interrupting."* This helps reintroduce one of the conversation or listening strategies you've taught to practice as a family at dinner.
- Recognize effort by noticing when they are working on their behaviors: *"I notice how you listened fully to your sister when she was upset. That's so helpful to her."*
- Play a favorite family game (*Headbands, Monopoly, Pictionary, Charades?*). At the start, set a goal to listen to each other carefully.
- Work on lateral thinking riddles or logic puzzles together that require attentive listening and critical thinking skills.
- Listen to TED talks together and discuss with your teen what was interesting or challenging about the talk.

Step 4. **Support** Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions such as: *"How did your lesson in literature class go today? Do you understand what you need to do for your long-term research paper?"*
- Learn about development. Each new age will present differing social challenges.
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for trying out new and different listening strategies can help offer additional support and motivation for your teen when tough issues arise.
- Engage in further practice. Return to setting a listening goal for dinnertime conversations to reinforce skills. Create more opportunities to practice when all is calm.

Trap When teens do not listen, give them another chance. We all lose our focus. Seek clarification on what they heard and did not, and then review what you said again to help them refocus their attention.

Step 5. Recognize Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well: *“I notice you listened with focus to your sister’s story. I know that makes her feel cared about. That’s so important.”*
- Recognize small steps along the way. Find small ways your teen is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, if your teen makes up for ignoring you by apologizing, sincerely recognize that effort. Include hugs, high fives, and fist bumps in your repertoire of ways to appreciate one another.

Trap Avoid gifts or other physical rewards for performance. These actually have a de-motivating effect on teens. When you remove the money, for example, have they internalized the skills and also the sense of responsibility for performing them? There’s less of a chance if you’ve offered a “bribe.” Focus on your attention as the best reward. Your attention and recognition add to their feelings of competence. This is an essential strategy in discipline for skill building.

Tip Be specific. “Good job” seems to not carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - *“you listened to your brother’s upset feelings and I know it meant a lot to him!”* - can promote more of the same.

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your teen’s success today and in their future!

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